

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: January 30, 2023

From: Jackie Teed, Acting Director
Climate Action, Planning and Development
File: 13.2630.06

Item #: 2023-20

Subject: **Renewed Child Care Protocol between the City of New Westminister and New Westminister School District No.40**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to forward a letter to New Westminister School District No.40 formally inviting them to jointly develop a renewed Child Care Protocol between the City of New Westminister and the School District.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's direction for staff to forward a letter to New Westminister School District No.40 formally inviting them to jointly develop a renewed Child Care Protocol, which would set a framework for closer collaboration with regard to the development of new and the retention of existing child care spaces.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Quality, accessible and affordable child care provides significant benefits for children, families, and the larger community. While funding and provision of child care is a senior government responsibility, both the City and the School District play important facilitative roles in helping maintain, secure and develop licensed child care spaces within their collective control. Recognizing the benefits of cooperation, the City has a long history of collaborating with the School District to address child care needs, including through its original Child Care Protocol with the School District in 2009.

Several recent events have precipitated the need to renew the former Child Care Protocol. In November 2022, the City was formally advised that the School District would be utilizing existing Neighbourhood Learning Centre spaces to realize additional classroom capacity, which would displace two non-profit child care facilities (with a total of 74 spaces) that are currently serving families in the periphery of the Downtown. In a formal response to the School District, the City emphasized the importance of retaining existing child care spaces within their control, and renewing and recommitting to a Child Care Protocol, similar to the one that was adopted in 2009.

In 2022, the Ministry of Education became the Ministry of Education and Child Care. Renewing the Child Care Protocol with the New Westminster Schools would align with the expanded mandate of the Ministry, and leverage the Ministry's increased involvement to help realize much needed child care spaces, including better positioning the School District and City for successful application to Provincial child care grants.

BACKGROUND

Quality, accessible and affordable child care provides significant benefits for children, families, and the larger community, including employers.

For children, quality child care positively influences child development, which from the School District's perspective, facilitates school readiness and success. For parents, quality child care positively influences parenting decisions and contributes to child wellbeing. From the City's perspective, child care enables parents to work and contribute to the local economy. Employers also consider the availability of child care as part of their location and relocation decision-making.

The City's Role in Facilitating Child Care

Funding and provision of child care is a senior government responsibility, which resides with the Province and is now within the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

The City plays a facilitative role, including but not limited to: developing needs assessments and strategies; applying for and managing grants; coordinating rezoning applications in support of child care; prioritizing permits for child care spaces in schools; and, advocating to the senior levels of government on child care issues, including related to funding, staff remuneration, subsidies, etc.

The City's Collaboration with the School District

Recognizing that there are many advantages to delivering child care and community services for children and families on school sites, the City has a long history of collaborating with the School District.

This collaboration was enshrined in 2009, when the City and School District endorsed a Child Care Protocol, committing both organizations to working together "to maintain, stabilize and increase the viability of existing licensed child care spaces within their

collective control, and to plan for and develop, if feasible, new child care spaces on their collective lands.” Attachment 1 includes a copy of the Council endorsed Child Care Protocol and accompanying Report to Council.

Attachment 2 summarizes City and School District collaboration since the ratification of the Child Care Protocol related to child care and child development.

It is noted that City’s Child Care Strategy (2016) includes the following recommendation:

- That the City and School District review the Child Care Protocol (2009), which was endorsed by both parties, and that they identify additional opportunities for collaboration within their collective control.

Recent Calls for a Renewed Child Care Protocol.

On November 7, 2022, Mayor and Council received a letter from the School District regarding their current capacity challenges. The letter outlined their proposal to utilize the existing Neighbourhood Learning Centre spaces, including child care, at Fraser River Middle School and Ecole Qayqayt Elementary School in order to realize additional classroom capacity to meet their increasing enrollment numbers.

The City’s corresponding letter, dated November 29, 2022, acknowledged the School District’s challenging position and included the following key points:

- that the City and School District jointly advocate to the Province for additional support in meeting short- and long-term school capacity and child care needs, which are fundamentally within provincial jurisdiction; and,
- that the City and School Board renew and recommit to a Child Care Protocol, similar to the one that was adopted in 2009.

This report’s discussion section outlines opportunities and next steps related to a renewed Child Care Protocol.

DISCUSSION

Maintaining Existing Spaces

The City and School District each currently lease space to a number of non-profit child care operators, which represents a significant percentage of the non-profit child care spaces in New Westminster. As such, maintaining and expanding on these spaces is critical if progress is to be made in meeting the child care needs of children and families.

The New Ministry of Education and Child Care

In 2022, the Ministry of Education became the Ministry of Education and Child Care. The Ministry's expanded mandate, which includes prioritizing locating child care in school buildings and on school grounds, reinforces the importance of existing child care facilities and programs on school sites and sets the stage for future expansion. The new Ministry also intends to better integrate child care and early childhood educators into the overall K-12 school system.

The Ministry will continue to prioritize child care space creation projects that maximize the number of spaces in high-need areas throughout the province through the Child Care BC New Spaces Program. Recently several key program changes have been announced, which will provide further opportunities for the City and School District to collaborate more strategically. These include increased priority for:

- long-term community investments run by public partnerships (e.g. school districts, local governments, etc.) and not-for-profit organizations (societies);
- projects that increase availability of infant/toddler and school age care spaces; and,
- projects that increase school-age space creation, including a new application stream for BC School Boards creating new spaces under the School Age Care on School Grounds license category type.

Given this shifting landscape, and the Ministry's increased involvement in helping to realize much needed child care spaces, renewing the Child Care Protocol could help ensure child care needs and opportunities are kept front of mind, and creative solutions are found. It will also better position child care applications for funding.

Development of the Protocol

Initiating the renewal of the Child Care Protocol will require a formal commitment from the School District to participate in collaboration with the City. As such, staff is first seeking Council direction to forward a letter to the School District inviting them to jointly renew the Child Care Protocol.

Should the School District agree, City staff in the Community Planning section would seek to work directly with the new School District Manager of Early Learning and Child Care, a position created to support the Ministry's expanded child care mandate. Ongoing work on the renewed Child Care Protocol would be coordinated by these staff, while strategic check-ins with respective senior staff would be facilitated through the Joint New Westminster Schools and City of New Westminster Working Group. The next joint meeting is anticipated in February 2023, at which time an update on the Child Care Protocol, if the School District agrees to participate, would be provided.

Internally, Community Planning staff would check-in with the City's Affordable Housing and Child Care Advisory Committee and corresponding Task Force on a regular basis with regard to the renewal of the Child Care Protocol.

To further inform the renewal of the Child Care Protocol, staff would conduct a municipal best practice review of municipalities in the region that have standing Child Care Protocols with their respective School Districts.

Key Elements of the Child Care Protocol

The rationale for a renewed Child Care Protocol would be to reestablish a commitment between the City and School District towards collaborative planning, efficient use of resources, and responsiveness to community needs, related to licensed child care spaces within their control. Key pillars to be reflected in the renewed Child Care Protocol could include:

- that the City continue to develop needs assessments and strategies; provide civic child care grants; coordinate rezoning applications in support of child care; and prioritize permits for child care spaces on school sites;
- that the School District document and communicate child care needs based on enrollment projections related to school age children;
- that existing child care spaces within City and School District control are secured and maintained, including the provision of affordable and sustainable lease arrangements;
- that new spaces within City and School District control are planned for and realized, including those arising from the construction of new or renovated civic facilities and schools;
- that the City and School District identify, communicate and apply for senior government funding opportunities and grants to their full potential; and
- that the City and School District, through the protocol, communicate the importance of quality, accessible and affordable licensed child care.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications related to developing the protocol, other than staff resources. The work would be led by the Community Planning section of the Climate Action, Planning and Development Department, and, if approved, the Supervisor for this section will prioritize this work, which may have implications for other work program items. Regarding any financial implications arising from completion of the protocol, and possible adoption by both organizations, City staff will seek Council approval for any child care grants or initiatives requiring City funding.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

If approved, the Community Planning section of the Climate Action, Planning and Development Department would work closely with other City Departments and Divisions, including Civic Buildings and Properties and Parks and Recreation. Community Planning staff would also work closely with the new School District Manager of Early Learning and Child Care.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council direct staff to forward a letter to New Westminster Schools District No.40 formally inviting them to jointly develop a new Child Care Protocol between the City of New Westminster and the School District.
2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommends Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2009 Child Care Protocol and Report to Council

Attachment 2: City and School District Collaboration Related to Child Care

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Anur Mehdic, Social Planner

This report was reviewed by:
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This report was approved by:
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